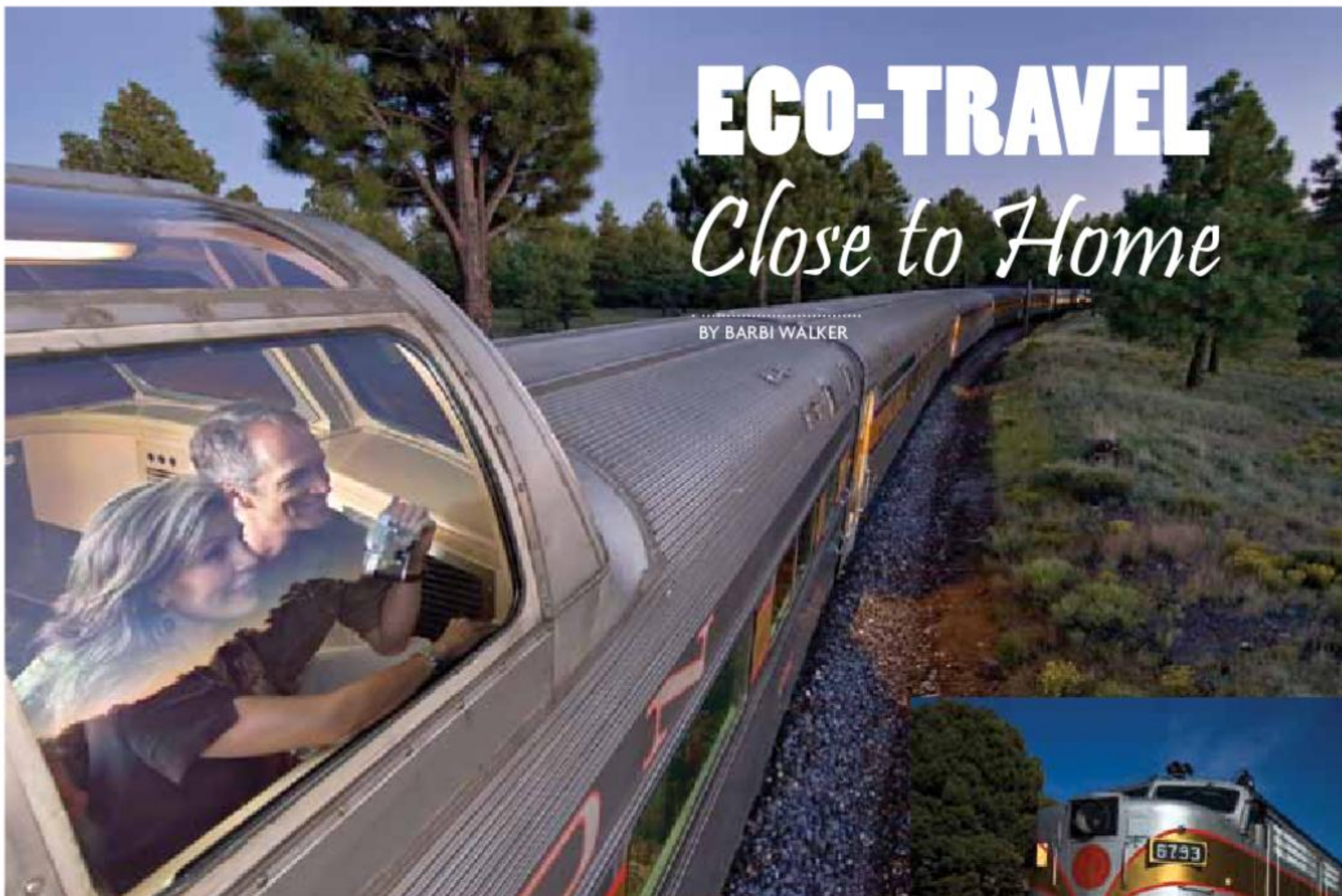


ECO-TRAVEL

Close to Home

BY BARBI WALKER



If you want to see Arizona's beautiful snow country this winter (without the hassle of snow tires), look no further than Grand Canyon Railway.

The railway, under new owner Xanterra Parks and Resorts, is now an eco-friendly and environmentally sustainable railway. Morgan O'Connor is the Director of Environmental Affairs for Xanterra and, according to some, the main force behind helping Grand Canyon Railway (GCR) go green.

O'Connor, who has a bachelor's degree in environmental planning and 10 years of experience in land planning, joined GCR to help with their green transition.

"I was tasked with creating and implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS)," O'Connor said via email. According to O'Connor, the railway uses 100 percent waste vegetable oil (WVO) to run its engines and to take visitors to and from Williams, Arizona, to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Additionally, they "eliminated the need to tap into the aquifer for 14,500 gallons of water per round trip, and use an alternative water source – rainwater and snowmelt catchment [for the special steam engine trips]," O'Connor said.

This clean-burning, 100 percent renewable fuel is collected from the railway's kitchens in Williams and the South Rim at the Grand Canyon. O'Connor said the WVO has less than half of the

particulate matter (PM) and criterion pollutants than diesel fuel, and no sulfur.

"The remaining WVO comes from the Frito-Lay plant in Phoenix," O'Connor said. "This closes a loop on a waste stream that most restaurants pay to have hauled away to a landfill. By reusing this waste, we close the loop."

Alternative fuel is just the beginning of GCR's sustainable efforts. Xanterra's environmental consciousness is woven into the fabric of its business model down to the employees, said Chris Lane, Xanterra's Vice President of Environmental Affairs.

The railway proudly boasts of its environmental certification from the esteemed International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The ISO is made up of 163 countries that develop and publish international standards of environmental management.

According to ISO's website, the ISO 14001 Certification is given to companies that identify and control the environmental impact of their activities, products or services; continually improve environmental performance; and implement a systematic approach to setting environmental objectives and targets.

The list of the railway's environmentally conscious efforts is long



and impressive; from paperless billing to collecting used batteries, to replacing all showerheads with low-flow models. Low-flow showerheads have helped GCR reduce its water use by 10 percent.

The company encourages employee participation in the process toward increasingly sustainable practices. According to Lane, it's been great to see how employees have embraced sustainability. Some of their sustainable efforts include collecting phone books, which are then donated to a local company that converts them into home insulation products; bringing in used aerosol cans and car batteries so GCR can keep them out of landfills and dispose of them properly; and burning used oil in the railway's commissary and maintenance facility heaters.

You can breathe easier knowing even the carpet and paint on the GCR train are low-VOC – so even those with respiratory concerns can enjoy the train ride to one of the world's seven wonders.

While up north, you can also visit other eco-friendly spots such as Garland's Oak Creek Lodge just outside Sedona. This 1900s homestead B&B has its own organic garden and apple orchard. The chef prepares delectable meals with these homegrown fruits and vegetables. Guest rooms are TV and telephone-free, which gives you a perfect excuse to sit on the porch and do nothing except take in the awesome canyon views. Guests can also collect eggs with the chef from the B&B's chickens for your morning omelet. Hiking, yoga and fishing are other eco-friendly things to do while you recharge yourself at Garland's.

There's also Annabel Inn in Cottonwood, where owner Annabel Scippa is so committed to being green that her cleaning detergent is made from berries harvested from trees. Soap Nuts, as it's called, has been used for centuries as a natural detergent, according to Roger Naylor's "Arizona eco-friendly bed-and-breakfasts" article on azcentral.com.

For the ultimate eco-vacation, visit Arcosanti. Just 70 miles north of Phoenix, Arcosanti isn't just a destination, it's an education on going green.

According to its website, arcosanti.org, Arcosanti houses 5,000 people and demonstrates ways to improve urban conditions and lessen the destructive impact on the earth.



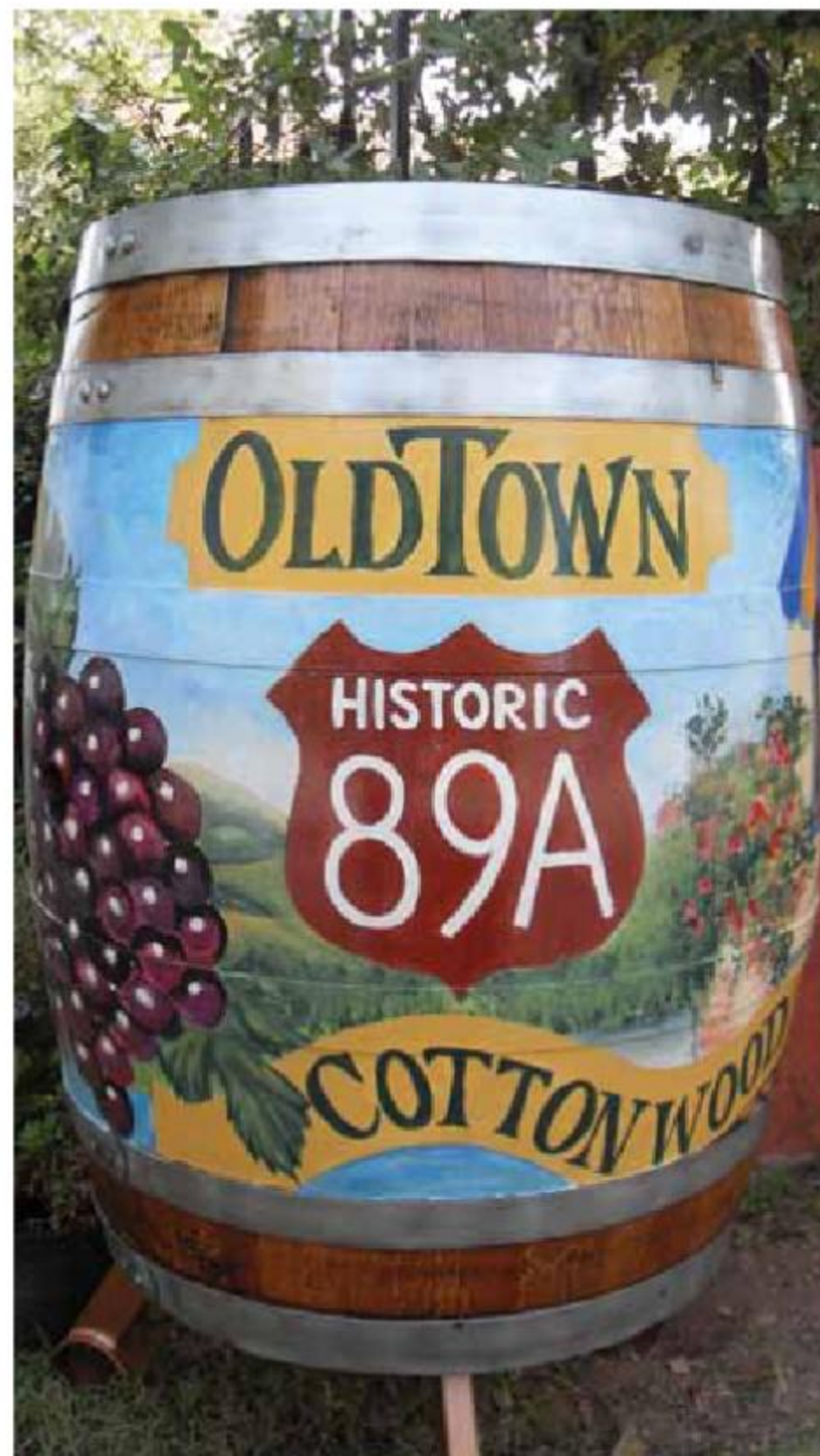
Famed architect Paolo Soleri coined the idea "Arcology," which espouses the ability to create cities with the amenities of urban living, yet minimize the impact of environmental damage and stay in harmony with the surrounding environment.

If you are looking for something different for your vacation this year, and want to have less impact on the environment, try one of these local eco-friendly destinations! ■

SOURCES

garlandslodge.com, iso.org, theannabelinn.com, thetrain.com, xanterra.com

Barbi Walker is a freelance writer and an award-winning journalist. Barbi lives in Phoenix with her husband and young son.



Top and Left:
Photos courtesy of Annabel Inn

Opposite page:
Photos courtesy of Grand Canyon Railway